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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 7160
INFO RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 6956

UNCLAS STATE 008512

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: OSCE: STATEMENT ON RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S CALL FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS REGION

¶1. Post is authorized to present the following statement at the January 28 Permanent Council meeting in Vienna.

Begin text:

Thank you, Mister Chairman.

The United States and other delegations have repeatedly voiced concern here in the Permanent Council over the past year regarding the increased incidences of violence in Russia's North Caucasus region targeted against journalists, human rights defenders, government officials, and citizens.

We agree with the European Union's statement today regarding the treatment of individuals in Russian police custody, which has recently led to abuses such as violence or neglect. We, too, welcome initial steps taken to investigate these crimes, and we urge that any criminal misconduct revealed by these investigations be fully and transparently prosecuted. Doing so, as the EU has noted, would further reflect Russia's dedication to fully implementing OSCE commitments.

In that regard we note Russian Federation Prime Minister Putin's call on January 24 for the protection of human rights organizations in the North Caucasus, following a long period of violence against and dangers confronting human rights activists in this troubled region. We hope his expectation that regional and local authorities will work with law enforcement agencies to ensure the proper operation and functioning of human rights organizations and the safety of human rights defenders is a new sign of the government's determination to turn the deteriorating situation around and to take steps to end the apparent air of impunity that now prevails.

It is time for those guilty of violence and murder to be brought to justice. We support the Government of Russia, in keeping with Prime Minister Putin's statement, in its efforts to ensure that Russian civil society organizations will be able to fully participate without unnecessary hindrance in contributing solutions to societal challenges and in advancing rule of law.

The United States welcomes this statement by the Russian Prime Minister as an acknowledgment by Russia of the importance of its OSCE commitments on fundamental freedoms and human rights, the protection of which will contribute to both internal and external security in a very volatile region. It remains our hope that these words will soon be matched by results which will demonstrate the faithful implementation of OSCE commitments.

END TEXT
CLINTON